



Hood River County 2023 – 2025 Strategic Plan Report

August
2023



SSW CONSULTING



Acknowledgments

Board of Commissioners

Jennifer Euwer

Chair

Leticia Moretti

Commissioner District 1

Arthur Babitz

Commissioner District 2

Ed Weathers

Commissioner District 3

Les Perkins

Commissioner District 4

SSW Consulting Team

Sara Singer Wilson

Principal/Owner

Ashley Sonoff

Associate

Sasha Konell

Communications + Engagement Strategist

Management Team

Jeff Hecksel, County Administrator

Belinda Ballah, Prevention Director

Brian D. Beebe, Records and Assessment Director,

Cheryl Berger, Human Resources Director

Tony Clark, Information Manager

Mikel Diwan, Public Works Director

Trish Elliott, Public Health Director

Matt English, Sheriff

Sheri Patterson, Finance Director

Carrie Rasmussen, District Attorney

Brian Rockett, Undersheriff

Doug Thieses, Forest Manager

Eric Walker, Community Development Director

Robbie English, Juvenile Justice Director



Table of Contents

06 Introduction

08 Strategic Plan Goals + Process

14 Mission, Vision + Values

16 Goals

24 Strategic Management

"Planning defines the particular place you want to be and how you intend to get there."

Peter Drucker

Introduction

A strategic plan acts as a compass. It helps an organization focus on a set of shared goals and guide it toward achieving them. The strategic plan provides defined goals and actions, rooted in priorities reflective of the current community and organization needs. The goals are informed by an understanding of current trends, along with an action plan to measure progress over time. Furthermore, a strategic plan fosters a culture of strategic management for the organization by serving as a guide for long-term planning as well as daily decisions concerning the organization's delivery of services and the community's future.

In 2021, the Board of Commissions and the management team developed a strategic plan to guide the organization over the next five years. The strategic plan included the development of the organization's mission, vision, and goals, with an action plan to implement the goals and advance the vision. Since the adoption of the strategic plan, the County has made significant progress addressing the most critical issues facing the community and organization. Furthermore, the implementation structure of the strategic plan has promoted accountability and transparency within the organization and community through regular quarterly updates and increased community engagement.

The linchpin of any strategic plan is keeping the plan relevant and responsive to the current community and organization needs. Over the past few years, the organization and community has faced many challenges – recovering from a global pandemic, record-high inflation, and increased demand for housing options, to name a few. To keep the plan relevant and support a culture of strategic management, the Board of Commissioners and management team gathered on March 14-15, 2023, for a strategic planning workshop. The purpose of the workshop centered on reconnecting on the progress of the strategic plan, establishing a shared understanding of the current community context, and developing a refined list of strategic plan goals and supporting actions to guide the organization in their service delivery to the community over the next five years. The County contracted with SSW Consulting, a professional strategic planning and facilitation firm to prepare and guide the team through their discussion and update of the strategic plan goals and actions.

The updated strategic plan will be used to chart the course for the organization in achieving the shared goals. While there are many priorities to be addressed, the County cannot focus on everything all at the same time. The strategic plan helps the organization maintain focus on the highest priorities for the next five years and guides how decisions are made and resources are used to address critical priorities as well as ensure alignment with the guiding mission, vision, and values. Progress on the strategic plan will be communicated regularly to promote accountability and transparency.

The Board of Commissioners and County staff are committed to serving the community and look forward to working together with community members and partner organizations to implement the strategic plan goals.

Strategic Plan

Goals + Process

The Hood River County Board of Commissioners and management team set out to achieve the following goals during the strategic plan update process:

- **Update the County's Strategic Plan to identify the County's priorities for the next five years.**
- **Review the existing vision and framework and consider any necessary updates.**
- **Provide progress updates on the current goals and strategies and identify updates to the goals that will advance the County towards the vision.**
- **Develop a shared understanding of the community and organizational context to inform the strategic plan.**
- **Develop actionable goals and identify potential indicators to guide the County in implementing and reporting progress on the goals.**

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

THE STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE WAS ORGANIZED INTO THREE PHASES:

1. PHASE 1: ORGANIZATION ENGAGEMENT + ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

What successes can we build on?

How has the context of the community and organization changed over the past two years?

What challenges do we need to address?

What new ideas or opportunities should we consider?

What should we prioritize over the next five years?

2. PHASE 2: STRATEGIC PLAN REFINEMENT WORKSHOP

Which actions have been completed?

Which actions are ongoing?

Which actions need refinement

Which new ideas will move forward?

What is the desired outcome for each goal?

3. PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN + STRATEGIC PLAN ADOPTION

How will we complete the actions and advance the goals?

How will the actions be prioritized?

How will we measure progress?

How will we communicate progress?

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

1. Organizational
Engagement +
Environmental
Scan

2. Strategic
Plan
Refinement
Workshop

3. Implementation
Plan +
Strategic Plan
Adoption

Phase 1: Organization Engagement + Environmental Scan

Organization Engagement

Organization engagement is the foundation of the strategic planning process. The engagement focused on gathering input from the Board of Commissioners and the management team. Prior to the workshop, SSW Consulting conducted interviews with the Board of Commissioners and management team to gather input on the implementation progress of the current strategic plan, notable accomplishments to highlight, challenges facing the community and organization, and opportunities to move forward in advancing the shared mission and vision. The agenda for the strategic plan refinement workshop was based on the outcomes identified through the outreach process.

Environmental Scan

The purpose of the environmental scan is to establish a shared understanding of the current community and organization context to inform the strategic plan update process. The exercise is an important component of refining and setting goals as the team discussion provides information on factors that will affect the community and organization in the future.

2021-2023 Accomplishments

The team began the environmental scan exercise by sharing a significant accomplishment from the past year. Acknowledging and celebrating successes together highlights the dedication and resiliency of County staff in serving the community during an exceptionally challenging time and offers important recognition of their work. Additionally, celebrating achievements brings the team together and sets the tone for future success as staff works to advance strategic plan goals and provide essential County services to the community.

Below are a few highlights and themes from the discussion:

- Completion of the employee compensation and classification study
- Employee recruitment, retention, and wages
- Financial stability of the County
- External communication
- Team building
- 2021 audit and investment return
- Restructured digital domain structure to improve access for file sharing, email system, and disaster recovery
- Forward progress on strategic plan goals
- Long-range planning

Current Environment: + Work Underway

The team completed a context mapping exercise to identify and discuss various factors impacting the organization that should be taken into consideration when setting goals. The team explored the current economic climate, political factors, community needs, organizational needs/trends, technology factors, and uncertainties. Additionally, the context mapping exercise included a review of current work underway by the organization to advance strategic plan priorities and provide essential County services in alignment with available resources and organizational capacity. The resulting shared comprehensive understanding of the community and organization context serves as a backdrop for the goal-setting process. Furthermore, the context map facilitates a proactive response to the most pressing challenges and issues facing the community and organization by setting focused, clear, and actionable goals. The below image summarizes the highlights and themes from the discussion:

Environmental Scan



Themes

Modernize
the County

Financial
Stability

Communication
+ Engagement

Housing

Forest
Management
Plan

Agriculture

Economic
Growth

Phase 2: Strategic Plan Refinement

Strategic Plan Goal Progress

County staff presented updates to the team on the current strategic plan goals and actions, including progress achieved over the last two years, obstacles or challenges, and additional opportunities to advance existing goals. During the discussion, the team noted if each supporting action is complete, shifted to ongoing operations, or needing refinement.

Idea Mapping + Goal Refinement

The team worked in small groups to complete a brainstorming exercise to refine existing strategic plan goals and actions flagged during the progress updates to address current community and organization needs as well as develop idea proposals for new priorities. The groups shared the results of their brainstorming exercise with the larger group and the ideas were categorized according to themes. The team reviewed the problem and/or challenge being addressed and clarified the intent for each goal area to provide clear direction and focus for the supporting actions to ensure alignment with desired outcomes.

During the second day of the workshop, the team refined the actions to focus on the most critical issues and provide clear direction to staff on the intention of each action to advance the goals.

What is a goal?

A goal is a desired result you want to achieve. It is typically broad and long-term. The goals support the overall mission and vision.

What is an action?

An action is an incremental step that moves the organization toward the goal. It is specific and measurable. Actions represent a policy, program, or project. The actions are organized by goal areas.

Phase 3: Implementation Plan + Strategic Plan Adoption

Implementation Plan

Following the workshop, County staff assigned “project sponsors” and “project leads” for each action and developed implementation time lines based on the priorities expressed by the Board of Commissioners, available resources, staff capacity, and work-flows. This information serves the implementation plan for the organization to move forward strategically to complete actions and advance the goals.

The scope and time line of the actions may vary. Some actions are significant undertakings and will require multiple years to achieve, while others are small in nature and can be achieved in a shorter time frame. Regardless of size and scope, all actions place a critical role in strengthening the organization and improving the delivery of services to the community.

The actions of the strategic plan are internally focused with the County organization responsible for implementation. While the County plays a critical role in achieving these actions, the organization, and ultimately the community, will be most successful through working with community partner organizations to implement the plan.

Strategic Plan Adoption

County staff presented the updated strategic plan to the Board of Commissioners on April 17, 2021 to gather feedback, address any remaining questions, and ensure clear direction for staff to implement the goals and actions. Staff incorporated any final revisions and the Board of Commissioners adopted the strategic plan on May 15, 2023.

Mission, Vision **Values + Goals**



MISSION

OUR DESIRED FUTURE STATE

EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNANCE PROVIDING THE FOUNDATIONAL SERVICES TO SUPPORT A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY FOR ALL.

VISION

**A SMALL COUNTY WITH A BIG MISSION:
PROVIDING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL.**

Values

WHAT GUIDES US...

Service

We value service through teamwork and partnerships. We work to provide the best customer service to those we serve. Service is our core purpose and we to provide the best for our community and partners.

Sustainability

We value sustainability in our use of all resources. We want to protect and preserve Hood River's natural resources for future generations and be good stewards of all that has been entrusted to us by the community. This includes the responsible use and management of fiscal resources to ensure sound service delivery that meets the expectations of the community while living within our means.

Trust

We value trust as a way to promote accountability and integrity in our organization's culture. We are open and honest, listening and being responsive to the community and organization to garner the trust needed collaboration.

Communication

We value consistent communication externally and internally to foster transparency and trust. This communication should flow between the Board, County staff, and the community, as well as internally across departments to ensure service delivery is aligned and reflective of current priorities.

Equity

We value equity in the delivery of our services and in practices in our organization. We work to ensure our services are accessible to all members of the community, and we start by modeling this value internally through our policies, procedures, and culture.

Goals

WHAT ARE OUR DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATION?

Modernize

Modernize the County organization, internal systems for effective, efficient, and resilient services

Financial Stability

Foster financial stability and strength

Housing

Increase housing diversity and affordability

Economic Growth

Support economic growth and high quality job generation

Communications

Enhance communications and engagement internally and externally

Forest Management

Adapt the Forest Management Plan to meet current and future needs.

Progress Reporting

The Board of Commissioners and staff developed the following process to support accountability and transparency in the implementation of the strategic plan goals and actions.

The County Administrator will present quarterly updates to the Board of Commissioners on the goals and actions. These updates will include any progress to advance the goals, reporting on success measures, challenges to be addressed, and areas needing clarification and/or further direction from the Board. Additionally, staff will highlight any goals and actions in department quarterly reports. Staff will continue to provide real-time updates to the Board on relevant projects. The management team will discuss progress and updates on the goals and actions during their regular monthly meeting.

“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”

Sir Winston Churchill

Goal 1:

Modernize

the County organization, internal systems for effective, efficient, and resilient services

Actions	Action Lead	Year
1.1 Improve the County's retention and recruitment efforts	Human Resources	2023-2024
1.2 Conduct an IT Needs Assessment to identify needs and potential solutions for improving resiliency, staffing, use of data, and standardization of technology systems	Admin + IT	2023-2025
1.3 Enhance the County's technical infrastructure to support an expanded digital footprint	Admin + IT	Ongoing
1.4 Establish relationships and systems for robust cross departmental resources supports	All	Ongoing
1.5 Update the administrative code	Admin	2023-2026
1.6 Explore a learning management system to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for employees	Human Resources	2025-2026

Goal 2:

Foster

financial stability and strength

Actions	Action Lead	Year
2.1 Annually review and establish sustainable budget processes, define sustainability, and set reserve level policies accordingly	Admin + B&F	Ongoing/ Annually
2.2 Identify funding needs and staffing levels for the future to deliver County services	Admin + B&F	2023-2024
2.3 Complete the organizational resilience study and prioritize recommendations	All	2023-2024
2.4 Evaluate needs for the levy renewal or alternative through assessing current public safety services and emergency planning efforts	Budget Committee, Commissioners + Staff	2023-2024
2.5 Analyze new or additional revenue sources	All	Ongoing
2.6 Identify opportunities for special districts and the County and convene partners to ensure adequate service delivery to County residents	Commissioners + Admin	Ongoing

Goal 3:

Increase

housing diversity and affordability

Actions	Action Lead	Year
3.1 BOC revisit the Commission's role in supporting the increase of the County's housing supply throughout the region	Commissioners	2024
3.2 Support urbanization in Odell and Parkdale	Community Development	2021-2022
3.3 Support the cities' efforts to increase housing opportunities	Admin + Commissioners	2022-2023
3.4 Evaluate the transportation system to leverage existing housing - Facilitating multi-modal transit options for neighborhoods	Commissioners + Staff	2025-2026

Goal 4:

Support

economic growth and high quality job generation

Actions	Action Lead	Year
4.1 Review economic drivers of Hood River County and develop an economic profile	Admin + Commissioners	2025-2026
4.2 Clarify the County’s special role in the agricultural sector of the local economy	Admin + Commissioners	2024-2025

Goal 5:

Enhance

communications and engagement efforts internally and externally

Actions	Action Lead	Year
5.1 Develop a communication and branding policy to promote consistency in brand and messaging across the County	All	Ongoing

Goal 6:

Adapt

the Forest Management Plan to meet current and future needs

Actions	Action Lead	Year
6.1 Evaluate opportunities for additional revenue sources from Forest services/ resources	Forestry	Ongoing
6.2 Secure more forest land	Forestry	Ongoing
6.3 Complete the 10 year Forest Management Plan update	Forestry	Underway

Fostering a Culture of Strategic Management

The intention of a strategic plan is to foster a culture of strategic management and guide the organization in developing a more efficient, effective, and transparent system of providing public services. Regular engagement from the community, Board of Commissioners, and the organization are essential to fostering a system that is responsive and accountable. It is recommended the strategic plan be updated annually to ensure the goals and actions remain relevant in meeting current community and organization needs. Additionally, annual updates maintain alignment among the strategic plan, budget, and department work plans.

The strategic plan should undergo a complete update every five years to conduct more comprehensive engagement, review the mission, vision, and values, and examine the broader community context. These major updates will ensure the five-year vision continues to serve as a North Star in guiding the community and organization. These community engagement efforts also help to foster strong relationships with the community and partner organizations to build support for implementing the goals.



Hood River County
601 State Street
Hood River, OR 97031